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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ANTI-HIZBALLAH SHIA FIGURE TALKS UP
FORMER HIZBALLAH SECRETARY GENERAL TUFAYLI

REF: A. BEIRUT 456

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 554

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Independent Shia figure Ahmad Assad argued that former Hizballah Secretary General Subhi Tufayli is "ready" to join forces against Hizballah, but that first he needs to have resolution of criminal charges against him for involvement in the killing of an LAF officer and a French citizen. (Note: Tufayli remains on the USG Terrorist Watch List. End note.) Assad introduced a board member of his anti-Hizballah political party, Amcit Abdallah Bitar, a prominent businessman from Shia-dominated Nabatieh in southern Lebanon. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In preparation for his second trip of the year to the U.S. to garner support for his anti-Hizballah movement, independent Shia figure Ahmad Assad introduced a member of his four-person delegation, Abdallah Bitar, to the Charge on April 23. Bitar, an Amcit, is the head of the Chamber of Commerce in the Shia-dominated city of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon, and recently joined the board of Assad's political party Lebanese Options Group (LOG) (Ref A). DCM and EmbOffs also attended the meeting.

FORMER HIZBALLAH SECRETARY GENERAL
"READY TO LEAVE"

[1](#)3. (C) Like Lebanese Forces Leader Samir Geagea (ref B), Assad mentioned the name of former Hizballah Secretary General Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, arguing that he is "away from his old rhetoric and ready to leave (his past alliance)" and the U.S. should work with him. Assad explained that Tufayli has been accused of giving orders to kill a Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) officer during the 1990's. Tufayli claims he is innocent and is ready for a trial, Assad said, but his case has been shelved despite an outstanding Lebanese warrant for his arrest.

[1](#)4. (C) Assad said that several years ago majority leader Saad Hariri had purportedly offered assistance to Tufayli to push the case along, but dropped his efforts, citing French resistance. Saad reportedly told Tufayli to wait until the last French presidential election, but Tufayli has not

received a positive response to his appeals from Saad since President Sarkozy took office.

15. (C) Arguing that the U.S. should push the GOL to give Tufayli a trial, Assad said that Tufayli would be a valuable asset in countering Hizballah's influence. He could direct "a few thousand votes" in the Bekaa, Assad predicted, which would be a blow against Hizballah. Assad acknowledged that Tufayli has not yet departed from his anti-U.S. views. (Note: Tufayli remains on the USG Terrorist Watch List. End Note.)

HIZBALLAH INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTH

16. (C) A prominent Shia from Nabatieh, Bitar reported that Iran, through its "Iranian Organization for Rebuilding Lebanon," is busy with improvements in the south, including building streets, parking lots, etc. The organization employs many Lebanese and pays them directly, he added. Bitar explained that people in the south currently have no assistance from the government, and are in need of social services and medical aid.

17. (C) Bitar said he has always communicated with everyone, naming Speaker Nabih Berri and Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, in particular. He caveated that he has not spoken with Nasrallah in some time. I am not switching sides by joining Assad, he explained, just moving from an apolitical stance to becoming more politically engaged. He noted that Hizballah is currently unhappy with him because of his friendship with Assad.

18. (C) Assad said that he is trying to work on the Shia clerics in Nabatieh to part with Hizballah, but they are

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afraid in part because their salary is controlled by Hizballah. Moreover, Assad continued, there is internal pressure from the residents to continue supporting Hizballah. He clarified that the Shia won't switch to March 14 if they leave Hizballah, but instead are looking for another Shia movement to support.

PUSHING FOR PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

19. (C) Assad said that head of the National Bloc party Carlos Edde (allied with March 14) and a March 14 MP are on his side in terms of advocating for proportional representation in a new electoral law. Assad said they are considering doing a joint press conference, but fear creating friction within the March 14 coalition.

COMMENT

110. (S/NF) This is the second time in two days Tufayli's name was passed to us. Assad was vague about Tufayli's exit from Hizballah. We know that Tufayli was expelled in 1998 from the organization and has since tried to rejoin as late as 2005. He was a founding member of Hizballah and served as Hizballah Secretary General from 1989-1991. He is wanted by the

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Lebanese authorities for killing soldiers and civilians in 1998 clashes. The list of his anti-U.S. rhetoric is long, including praise for the 9/11 attacks and a desire to have participated in the 1983 U.S. Marine barracks bombings. We plan to ask the French about their own interest in Tufayli. Our assessment is that Tufayli would not bring much Shia strength to Ahmed al Assad's organization; indeed, with Tufayli's reputation, legal problems, and reputation for corruption, he would more likely bring discredit. End comment.

